

AN
ORATION,

Delivered at NEW-SALEM, JULY 4th, 1797 ;

BEING THE ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

INDEPENDENCE

OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

BY JOEL FOSTER.

*Savior armis,
Luxuria incubuit [Romæ] victumque ulciscitur orbem.*
JUVENAL.

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An Oration, &c.

THE joyful day has revolved upon us, my Countrymen and Fellow-citizens, which recovers to our thoughts a series of events, not only interesting to the feelings of every true AMERICAN, but which have arrested the attention of an astonished world ! It is the *birth day* of our Nation, which brought her forth into a separate political existence, and gave her a distinguished rank among sister Kingdoms and Republics.

ON a day like this, which brings to our remembrance a catalogue of all the leading circumstances, which paved the way to our Independence, we cannot avoid being affected with very different sensations : We cannot forget our former injuries and resentments, at the same time that we rejoice in the present happy situation of our country ; and, with the most exhilarating emotions of mind, contemplate the rising progress of our political greatness and security.

WITH an accelerated motion of thought, we run over the several distinguished periods which
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have marked the road of Providence, and guided our unexperienced steps to the goal of political manhood and maturity.

THE bold hand of imagination draws a scenery which cannot fail to catch the attention of every contemplative mind. Aided by a magic peculiar to herself, she rolls back the sun a century and an half—she erases the feats of industry—she demolishes cities and temples, and exhibits to our view this wide extended country in it's native dress, rude, uncultivated, and without inhabitants. She presents the fancy with here and there a savage hunter, while the woody mountains and dales are teeming before them with howling beasts and poisonous reptiles. Between this and the mother country, she raises up to view a huge impervious ocean, and in her story magnifies the dangers of attempting to cross it. Then she diverts our attention by tempting the ambition and enterprize of her heroes, with certain lucrative motives, to try the dangerous passage, and, if possible, form settlements in this unknown wilderness. But she all along leaves them unsuccessful and makes their attempts abortive. At length she varies the scene and gives us a picture of what persecution can do: She so manages the story of the High Church party, and makes them so domineering and abusive to the Dissenters, as to force them, for their own safety, and for the sake of enjoying their civil and religious liberties, to thrust themselves from the bosom of their native country, and commit their lives and fortunes to the merciless seas. At this period,

period, imagination ascends her car and rides in pensive state behind them. She sees them pass through inexpressible toils, losses and sufferings till a feeble and disheartened few are allowed to set foot on the American shores. Here she gives us a portrait of what Providence had done to make room for her strangers, in sweeping off the natives by a raging pestilence ; and after committing her new-comers to the nurturing hand of Providence, imagination retires, and the story becomes real ! *Real*, did I say ? It is all hitherto founded upon fact ; but like other facts of a remote date, which lie neglected in the musty page of the historian, it passes with us as a dream. We are too unmindful of the ways of God, whose wisdom is conspicuous in ordering the occasion and means of emigration, in dividing to the nations their inheritance, and determining the bounds of their habitation.

BUT the history of our own country is fresh in all our minds. And as we have advanced in thought to the beginnings of our settlement in this western territory, we are now presented with an open theatre on which a succession of the most interesting and important events have rapidly taken place. Our attention is no longer held to the first planting of our fore-fathers in this new world, or to the first stages of their political existence ; but with pleasure we trace their increase and progress till, under the royal patronage, farther settlements were encouraged, and they were formed into distinct corporations and colonies. Their lands
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were chartered to them, and constitutions were formed and guaranteed to them by the reigning king and his successors, which defined the principles of their distinct polities and governments.

By these charters, our connexion with the King of Great Britain was, indeed, asserted and stipulated ; but the prerogatives of the crown were limited, and the rights of the colonies ascertained and secured. The King was to be acknowledged as our rightful sovereign and liege lord ; but we were not, by these constitutions, brought under the authority of the British house of Parliament. We had elective assemblies and representative bodies of our own, to frame our laws of justice and rules of political intercourse. And notwithstanding the efforts of restless power, which had an effect, in some instances, to mutilate and change our charters, in others, to vacate them, which occasioned uneasiness and gave rise to frequent remonstrances ; yet we were so fortunate as to obtain those redresses which still preserved the idea of a mutual interest between the two countries.

UNDER these circumstances our nation flourished, and we rapidly increased in numbers, wealth and military force. From these small beginnings, we became great, numerous, rich and powerful. Nature and the hand of industry stored our country with all the necessaries for subsistence in a time of peace, and for defence in war.

IN this situation, our mother country being insensible of the maturity to which we had advanced,

vanced, began to be jealous, only, of our rising greatness. And to secure our future subjection, and share our future wealth, she adopted measures which thwarted the principles of our charters, and removed the great barriers of our freedom. Her claims became more and more exorbitant, and alarming to the spirits of Americans. Not content in abridging us in the freedom of our trade by what was called the navigation act, to which we had long reluctantly submitted, the parliament at length formed a design to raise a revenue by an internal tax upon colonies; and, as a first experiment, the stamp act was brought forward, which excited such a general uneasiness as soon to procure it's repeal: Yet the Parliament took this occasion to assert their own prerogatives, and declared that they had a right to make laws binding upon the colonies in all cases whatever. This declaration was justly supposed to contain the essence of despotism. From this moment our hearts began to be alienated from the parent country, and all our affairs took a most serious turn. We were prepared to make the most decided opposition to the subsequent oppressive acts of Parliament—such as imposed duties upon tea, and other articles of importation—such as were designed to affect our internal policy—to controul the powers of our corporate towns—to mutilate our judiciary system, and alter our modes of trial, &c.

A PARTICULAR recital of these abuses, and of the unreasonable strides of despotism, would necessarily carry me beyond the limits which I have
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been obliged to prescribe to myself, and, perhaps, only agonize the patience of this respectable Audience. Your memories will supply the defect— You will easily call to mind the measures adopted by the British King and Government to quash what they called the rebellion of Americans, and to enforce their own laws—the act for blocking up the harbour of Boston, and the stationing of several regiments of regular troops in the town to support the Governor and his Officers in carrying into effect the resolutions of Parliament. Most of us were witnesses to the universal trepidation which, at that time, pervaded the country, and shook the breasts of our greatest heroes and politicians.

WHEN matters came to this extremity, few as our means were, it was thought best to provide against the worst. Inventive necessity called forth the powers of the human mind, like the latent spark from the flint, into action. She explored the abilities and resources of the country, which, till then, had been hidden and unknown, like treasures in the bowels of the earth.

BUT no sooner were the court of Britain informed of our policy, than orders were issued for destroying our magazines and military stores. An attempt of this kind was made on the nineteenth of April, 1775, and the first battle at Lexington ensued. Here the tragic story of the war begins—here the door opens to those scenes of devastation, blood and death, through which we have waded in the defence of our liberties, and which lay an infinite bond upon posterity to defend them till
time

time shall be no more ! But I forbear :—I would not wound your feelings, on this joyful day, by dwelling upon a subject so painful.

It is, however, presumed, whatever our sensations might then be, that it will quicken the grateful and joyous emotions of our hearts, on this occasion, to recollect, that the truly patriotic sons of Massachusetts had the courage to repel force by force—that the fire of resentment, quick as the electric shock, spread itself through all the sister colonies, gave impulse to our united exertions, and made our opposition to tyranny successful. Such a remarkable union took place through the whole, as clearly evinced a design in Providence that we should be free. Though never before bound by any particular social compact, all the States, at once felt the fraternal tie ; our hearts, our interests and our councils were united to bear down the bulwarks of oppression ; but even now the idea of **INDEPENDENCE** did but begin to dawn in the minds of some few of our political fathers.

BEFORE the war actually broke out, we had selected some of the wisest and most experienced of our Brethren to constitute a national council or Congress. These sage Patriots conducted with a coolness, discretion and intrepidity suitable to the critical situation of the country and the confidence reposed in them. Even after America's soil was stained with the blood of her sons, they resolved to try the effect of one petition more for peace, liberty and safety. But they were unsuccessful in this, as they had been in former experiments of

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the like kind. Thus it appeared, from a long series of occurrences, that the way was prepared, and America ripened for a mighty change in her affairs, and means were not wanting to effect it. The conduct of Britain furnished the occasion, and pointed out the road to our Independence, and Providence evidently called us to assume a new political rank among the nations.

ACCORDINGLY, on the ever memorable *fourth of July '76*, the American Congress laid the broad basis of this then infant empire, which has since advanced to a more desirable maturity. On the corner stone thereof we find this inscription: "We hold these truths," say they, "to be self evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the governed; and that when any government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter, or abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall appear most likely to effect their safety and happiness."—After some farther preamble, and a particular enumeration of the abuses, and grievances which ushered in the war, and gave the occasion for Independence, they come to the following declaration, which ought never to be obliterated from the minds

minds of Americans : “ We therefore, the representatives of the United States of America, in Congress assembled, appealing to the supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions, do in the name of these Colonies, solemnly publish and declare, that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, FREE AND INDEPENDENT STATES : That they are absolved from all allegiance to the British Crown, and that all political connexions between them and the State of Great Britain is, and ought to be totally dissolved.”

THUS was the political birth of our nation ushered in, and America separated from the Mother country, which had forgotten her children and become cruel like the *Ostrich*.

WE do honor to ourselves in commemorating an event so interesting and important in the scale of human affairs. The American revolution has justly been considered as forming one of the most distinguished epochs in the history of mankind.—In its progress, it has been the means of disseminating just sentiments of the rights of man, and of the nature of legitimate governments—It has excited a spirit of opposition to tyranny in general, and is likely to give a lead to universal liberty. It has furnished the world with a short experiment of a Republican Government, founded upon principles more equitable and more liberal than any before known.—It has prepared an asylum for the oppressed in every region of the earth, and laid the foundation of an empire which may be
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the seat, not only, of freedom, but of science and virtue. And may we not hope, that these blessings will, from hence, spread themselves, till they become universal, “ and that ignominious “ slavery, which hath hitherto debased the world, “ is exterminated !”

SINCE the declaration of our Independence—since it hath been supported, and by the parent country acknowledged, we have had the rare and uncommon opportunity of entering into an original compact among ourselves, and of framing a Constitution of Government, which unites the interests and subjects of the several States under one political head. The *Federal Constitution* has been the result of deliberation, and confirmed by the free suffrages of the people. It was not, like the Constitutions of many other nations, brought forward by artful and designing men, and proposed to the great body of the nation when their hearts were agitated with fear, or their minds previously wrought upon by artifice, and prepared to receive any thing : But it was framed by wise men of our own choosing, and proposed to the free and leisurely adoption of the several States, when under no other annoyance than what arose from the critical situation of the whole.

SINCE the adoption of this national charter, the administration has been entrusted to men chosen by the people. It has had the effect to secure our peace, to afford due encouragement to the exertions of genius, to science in general, and to every useful manufacture. It has been effectual
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to quell turbulent insurrections, and provide for the national defence. Arts and Sciences have greatly flourished, and improved systems of education been adopted—Agriculture, Commerce, and all useful manufactures have made a rapid progress towards perfection—and every industrious class of citizens been uncommonly prosperous.

WHAT may we not hope from our *Federal Constitution* if it be wisely and faithfully administered. “A confederacy between free States, as “the American, may have advantages superior “to any civil establishment.” “If a republic be “small, says a great Politician,* it is destroyed “by a foreign force; if it be large, it is ruined “by an internal imperfection. This two fold inconvenience is remedied by a confederate republic—a kind of assemblage of societies, which “constitute a new one capable of increasing by “means of new associations. It was these associations that contributed so long to the prosperity “of Greece. By these the Romans attacked the “universe; and by these alone the universe “withstood them. For when Rome was arrived “to her highest pitch of grandeur, it was the associations behind the Danube and the Rhine, “associations formed by the terror of her arms, “that enabled the Barbarians to resist her.”

In pursuing the progressive steps of our national advancement, we have the pleasure to look over a list of the most distinguished Sages, Heroes and Statesmen that ever adorned the history
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* Spirit of Laws.

of any Country. These have been nurtured in the bosom of America, and successively appeared upon the stage, and in the different departments of business, as the exigencies of the nation required. Time will not permit me to enumerate all the public characters, who have deserved well of their country, and are intitled to the acknowledgments of a grateful people. Our hearts take a sincere part in the whole aggregate of those applauses and grateful eulogiums which have been heaped upon our late illustrious President and his Contemporaries, for their unremitted application, and indefatigable attention to the public weal; and for the important services they have rendered their country both in the field and in the cabinet. Like skillful pilots they have, under God, safely conducted our political ship and cargo through the dangers of a tempestuous season, and at length brought us into the port of Peace and plenty.— And from the present circumstances of our nation, and firmness of our government, does not the American Republic bid fair to endure when the power lately armed against it shall be broken in pieces, and the remembrance of it, perhaps, blotted out from under heaven!

WHILE we contemplate the improved state of our politics, and our happy lot among the nations of the earth, remote from the feuds and contentions which have infested Europe, it may not be unseasonable to call into view of what importance it is, and what obligations we are under to preserve our character as AMERICANS. And
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what is there which ought, and would more naturally distinguish Americans, than a national spirit of union and love of liberty, combined with the habits of industry and frugality?

Is there not reason to fear, that as we increase; as we enlarge our connections, and extend our commerce; a vain magnificence, the lust of power, profusion and luxury will creep in upon us, and the profligate manners of older countries be imported to this, in as large cargoes as foreign commodities? But why should we yield to the insidious influence of foreigners? Why should we ape their manners or imitate their fashions?—Does it not better become us to erect a character to ourselves, and establish habits of our own, which are more worthy of imitation, and better fitted to the principles of the revolution?

THE illustrious Patriots who laid the foundation of this rising Republic, in the declaration of our INDEPENDENCE (an event which we now celebrate) expressly recommended to us to be *frugal, industrious and temperate, shunning every species of extravagance and dissipation, and every expensive diversion.* “If persons of figure, fortune, and influence, would join in this laudible resolution, they would merit much of their country.” The fair daughters of America, while they enjoy the richest advantages of education, “would honour themselves by encouraging simplicity, economy and industry, promoting the manufactures of the country, and guarding against foreign fashions and amusements.”

It is not to be dissembled, that “bribery,
“corruption

“ corruption and tyranny always prevail where
 “ luxury doth, and nearly in the same propor-
 “ tion.” May the habits of temperance, in this
 country, never be lost in the excesses of luxury,
 nor our liberties be swallowed up in a flood of
 licentiousness. But may the spark of liberty,
 kindled in America, spread its flame through the
 whole earth, till all the fabrications of despotism
 are demolished, and the standard of freedom e-
 rected in the most remote empires.

ALREADY has the event we celebrate given
 a lead to the emancipation of several nations from
 slavery and oppression. Our Gallic Brethren,
 fired by our example, have ventured their single
 resistance against the most formidable combination
 of despots, and their unparalleled successes ar-
 gue a design in Providence that they shall be free,
 and the cause of liberty universally prevail.

WHILE we join our ardent and affectionate
 prayers for the restoration of their peace, the pro-
 tection of their freedom, and the permanent secu-
 rity of their Government ; let us still be watch-
 ful over our own liberties, and endeavour to se-
 cure and perpetuate, by our vigilance and virtue,
 what we have gained at the expence of so much
 blood and treasure. Then we may not only feli-
 citate ourselves in recognizing those past occur-
 rences which have contributed to build us up into
 a free Republic ; but with prophetic sagacity we
 may look through the blank space of unborn a-
 ges, and see our latest progeny rising into the
 fair possession of Freedom, and hear them call us
 blessed.

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